

The Framers of the Constitution never intended for one-half of one branch of government to be equipped with a kill switch that any Senator can push to avoid honest debate. The filibuster as it is used today doesn't promote bipartisanship. It is preventing bipartisan progress.

As I said, the proposal to form an independent commission to investigate the January 6 insurrection had broad, bipartisan support in the Senate. Six Republican colleagues had the courage to stand up and join all of the Democrats in calling for this January 6 commission. But a minority of Senators—all Republican—refused. This is not how our legislative process is supposed to function.

Our Nation's Founders wanted to give each Senator a voice, not a veto over every piece of legislation. That is how the filibuster is being misused today.

So as we celebrate the reopening of the Capitol grounds, let's take a moment to appreciate the fact our democracy has survived, but it cannot protect itself from future attacks. That responsibility falls on our shoulders. No wasting time on delay tactics; it is time to do the work that we were sent to Washington to do.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Republican whip.

ABORTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last month, Speaker PELOSI was asked if she thought a 15-week-old unborn baby was a human being. She declined to answer. A few days later, the President's Press Secretary was asked if the President thinks a 15-week-old unborn baby is a human being. She also declined to answer.

In case the President and the Speaker are in any doubt, let me just clear things up for them. A 15-week-old unborn baby is a human being. That baby has a human mom and a human dad, and human beings have other human beings. That is not a complex moral or philosophical question. That is biology 101.

Of course, I am pretty sure the reason the Speaker and the President's Press Secretary declined to answer these questions is not because they are confused about the answer. I don't think there is anybody out there who isn't aware on some level that unborn human beings are human beings. The moment of birth does not magically confer humanity.

No, the Speaker and the President don't want to admit that unborn children are human beings because admit-

ting it would make it hard to defend the fact that they support the right to kill these babies. If you support abortion, it is much easier to pretend an unborn baby is just a clump of cells rather than a separate human being with his or her own fingerprints and DNA. It is a lot easier to defend killing that baby if you pretend that baby is just a part of the mother instead of a unique, separate, unrepeatable individual.

That is why the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Press Secretary for the President of the United States have declined to answer a question any 10-year-old could answer: whether the baby inside his or her mom is a human being.

At the end of May, President Biden released his budget. It was a slap in the face to pro-life Americans. The President's budget abandons decades of bipartisan compromise and calls for the elimination of the Hyde amendment, which protects taxpayers from having their tax dollars go to fund abortions.

And that is not all. The budget contains a whole host of pro-abortion measures that would, among other things, direct taxpayer dollars to fund abortion providers here at home and overseas.

This isn't just some theatrical proposal. Democrats in the House of Representatives have already acted in committee to exclude the Hyde amendment and other pro-life measures from appropriations bills. If we can't agree that unborn human beings deserve to have their human rights protected, we should at least be able to agree that taxpayers should not be forced to fund the killing of unborn persons.

The American people don't think taxpayers should fund abortions. In fact, nearly 60 percent of Americans oppose taxpayer funding of abortions. The President himself has, as recently as his Presidential campaign, supported the Hyde amendment, but there is one interest group that controls the Democratic Party. It is the abortion industry and its supporters, and I guess the President figured that he needed to sacrifice his support for the Hyde amendment if he wanted to win the election.

And now Democrats and the President are following through by attempting to force taxpayers to pay for abortions. To hear Democrats talk, you would think abortion on demand, without limits, up until the moment of birth, was the standard position of this country and the world. But it is actually not. The United States is one of only a tiny handful of countries in the world—in the entire world—that allow elective abortions past 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Americans are squarely to the right of the Democratic Party on abortion. A strong majority of Americans believe abortion should be illegal or there should at least be some restrictions on abortion, and that has been the position of the American people for a long time.

Despite the Democrats' best efforts, Americans still aren't convinced unlimited abortion on demand should be the law of the land. It is really not surprising. No one who has ever heard the thump, thump, thump of an unborn baby's heartbeat really thinks that we are just talking about a clump of cells. No one who has ever looked at an ultrasound screen and seen an unborn baby waving her hands or kicking her feet is in any doubt that that baby is a human being.

And at some level, every person knows that human beings have human rights and that human beings deserve to be protected, even when they are small and weak and vulnerable—especially when they are small and weak and vulnerable.

No matter how hard the abortion lobby pushes, they can't convince the majority of Americans that abortion is an unqualified good. Unfortunately, however, they succeeded in turning the Democratic Party into their legislative arm. And President Biden and Democrats in Congress are obediently pursuing a radical abortion agenda that puts them squarely to the left of the majority of the American people.

It is not limited to taxpayer funding of abortion or abortion providers. President Biden nominated a radical pro-abortion crusader as the Secretary of Health and Human Services. In May, Secretary Becerra appeared before a House subcommittee where he chose to answer a question on Federal abortion law by indulging in a game of semantics. Not only did he fail to commit to enforcing the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, he refused to even acknowledge its existence, even though he voted against the law repeatedly during his time in the House of Representatives.

Then there is the so-called Equality Act—Democrats' unprecedented assault on free speech and religious liberty that would also erode conscience protections on abortions as well as restrictions on Federal funding. Under the Equality Act, doctors and nurses who have a moral objection to participating in abortions could be forced to participate or lose their jobs.

I haven't even mentioned the Women's Health Protection Act, sponsored by almost every Democrat in the Senate, which would threaten even the mildest State limits on abortion.

It is deeply disheartening that making sure unborn children are deprived of their human rights has become a defining cause for one of the two major parties in this country. We can do better than this. We have to do better than this.

Congressman Henry Hyde, for whom the Hyde amendment was named, once noted that abortion—which, as he said, denies "an entire class of human beings the welcome and protection of our laws"—is a betrayal of "the best in our tradition."

And he was right. What kind of a message does it send to our children

when we tell them that an entire class of human beings is not worthy of protection, when we deny human rights to the most innocent and vulnerable humans among us? We have to do better.

To my Democratic colleagues, I would say, if we cannot act today to secure justice and human rights for unborn human beings, let's at least stand for the great American tradition of freedom of conscience and protect the rights of doctors and nurses who decline to participate in abortions. Let's at least spare Americans who oppose the taking of innocent human life from having their tax dollars go to fund abortions. At the very, very least, we should be able to agree upon that.

As I said, I am saddened and disheartened that a major political party in this country made depriving unborn human rights as their defining cause, but their right to life will not be ignored.

While Democratic leaders may deny the humanity of the unborn, there are a lot of Americans out there—a lot of Americans—who recognize it. I have faith that sooner or later this country will live up to its founding promise and the best of its tradition and extend the protection of its laws to every human being, born and unborn.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to finish my remarks, roughly 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TEXAS LEGISLATURE

Mr. CORNYN. Well, just when you think you have seen it all, Mr. President, something new happens here in Washington, DC. All eyes are now on DC's newest asylum seekers, the members of the Texas House of Representatives, the Democratic Representatives.

But the only oppressive force that these men and women are facing is the expectation that they would actually do their jobs in the Texas Legislature, the job they campaigned for and were elected to do.

Following unsuccessful attempts to pass an election integrity bill during the regular legislative session earlier this year, Governor Abbott has now called a special session for the Texas Legislature to consider that and other matters. That special session kicked off last Thursday, but the chamber is already being held hostage by a minority of house members who are unwilling to do their job. The Democrats raised concerns about the current draft of the bill. Make no mistake. That is why the legislative process actually exists. That is why it is important that they be there and debate the issues and actually vote on the bill. The purpose, of course, is for all sides to be able to debate, potentially amend, and vote on legislation.

Yet, rather than do their jobs in Texas, yesterday, house Democrats abandoned both our State and the mil-

lions of Texans whom they represent and decamped to Washington, DC, when they were faced with the prospect of defeat. For better or for worse, the legislative process is all about arithmetic. You are not always going to win every debate you are involved in. That doesn't mean you leave the State and refuse to do your job, but that is exactly what they did. They got on two chartered jets—maskless and with at least one case of light beer—to come to Washington, DC.

The problem—and, really, what is so sad—is I don't think these legislators realize the irony of the situation. They are using their collective power as the minority party to stop a bill they oppose from becoming law. While doing so, they have come to Washington to try to convince the President and Senate Democrats to nuke the very Senate rule that protects the rights of the minority—in other words, you might say, a filibuster for me but not for thee. As a reminder, this is the second time they have denied the legislature a quorum this year.

I think it is pretty obvious that this was nothing more than a political stunt when these lawmakers skipped town with no plan as to when they would return to their jobs in Texas. Frankly, the Governor, under the Texas Constitution, can continue to call as many special sessions as he wishes and without limitation. So we all know how this will end. They will eventually go home. After the cameras leave and after the press loses interest in this political stunt, they will go home, and they will participate in the process.

It is telling that these Democrats in this house of representatives chose to race toward TV cameras in Washington rather than present their arguments in the legislature, and it is not without some risk to them. I am advised that they were on Federal property and referred to a website, which was actually a fundraising site, for their efforts. We all know there are limits—in fact, strict limits—on any fundraising on Federal property. So they may have crossed a line, unwittingly or not.

This is simply an embarrassing dereliction of their duty and a shameful political stunt, as I said. They can't win. So they are doing the equivalent of “I will take my ball and go home” or, in this case, “I am simply running away.” Texans standing up to a fight is part of who we are, even if you know, in the end, you may not prevail. Instead, they turned their backs, hopped on a private jet, and ran from this fight.

Like our Democratic colleagues in Congress, Texas State lawmakers have tried to create a false choice between voter access and election security. I think it boils down to this: We should be making it easier to vote and tougher to cheat, plain and simple. It is disingenuous and downright false to claim any effort to prevent fraud is a veiled attempt at voter suppression. We know that minority voters, voters of color,

voted at unprecedented levels in the 2020 election.

In my State, we had 66 percent of registered voters vote and the highest levels in history of African-American and Hispanic voters—so much for this idea that, somehow, the people who want to be able to vote can't vote even though we ordinarily have 2 weeks of early voting before the general election. We have mail-in ballots for people who are disabled, who are over 65, or who cannot—or otherwise will not—be in town on election day. Of course, we have election day voting as well. In 2020, we had 11.3 million Texans who cast their ballots—as I said, 66 percent of registered voters. The last time I was on the ballot, in 2014, we had 4.8 million voters—4.8 to 11.3 in 6 years alone. So believe me—there is robust voter participation, and nothing the Texas Legislature is considering will deny people their legitimate right to vote and ability to cast their votes, and that is appropriate that they should do so.

There are other additional items in the Governor's call for this special session, including things like bail reform and family violence prevention. Of course, by fleeing town and coming to Washington in this political stunt, the Democratic house members are abdicating their responsibility to deal with these other issues as well. It is not just about election law reform; it is about these other issues like bail reform and family violence prevention.

I believe firmly and am confident I am in the majority of my constituents, of my 29 million constituents, that they actually expect us, when we run for office and when we get elected, to show up for our jobs and not take part in a highly orchestrated and ethically dubious act of political theater.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON ZEYA NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Zeya nomination?

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BRAUN), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), and the Senator from Indiana (Mr. YOUNG).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Indiana (Mr. YOUNG) would have voted “yea.”